

**Political History Collection  
Interview H.0001.03 : Tape 3**

**Melvyn Goldstein, Editor**

**Center for Research on Tibet  
Department of Anthropology**

**and**

**Case Western Reserve University  
Cleveland, Ohio**

**©2004**

---

**Location of Interview:** Dharamsala, India  
**Date of Interview:** October 1992  
**Language of Interview:** Tibetan  
**Interviewed by:** Paljor Tsarong  
**Name:** Drakten [Tib. grags bstan]  
**Gender:** Male  
**Age:** 57  
**Date of Birth:** 1935

---

## **Abstract**

Drakten [Tib. grags bstan] was a monk official in the traditional Tibetan government who discusses in detail the political events that occurred in Lhasa in the 1950s. In this interview, he discusses in detail the political events and conflicts that occurred in the late 1950s, especially those brought about by the 17-Point Agreement. He also describes how, in his view, the Chinese failed to abide by the Agreement. He also talks about the time when the Dalai Lama was invited to attend a show in the main Chinese military headquarters in 1959.

---

## **Tape 3**

**Q:** Kungö, we Tibetans say that the 17-Point Agreement had to be signed, since it was said that if the Tibetans did not sign, then the Chinese would forcefully liberate Tibet.

**A:** Yes, that's exactly right.

**Q:** Now, even after the signing, we say that later the Chinese did not stick to the 17-Point Agreement. Last time when I was talking with Surkhang's grandmother, she said that Sawangchemmo (Surkhang), at somewhere in Tashilhunpo, had said the same thing, that he gave a good speech about the Chinese's failure to uphold all of the terms of the 17-Point Agreement. For example, it is stated in the 17-Point Agreement that the Dalai Lama's power and status will remain. We say that the Dalai Lama had been forced to go to various meetings, and that when the Chinese came to visit the Dalai Lama, they did not abide by the protocol and came in all kinds of ways. So, we say that from so many aspects, they did not stick to the 17-Point Agreement. I want to ask you about that. How was it?

**A:** It is what you have said. For example, it stated in the 17-Point Agreement that the power and status of the Dalai Lama, the customs of the country, would not change. Now, if we take the status of the Dalai Lama when he was invited to India for the Buddha Jayanti, it is said that the Chinese first told him that he could not go. I have heard that though I can't point to a proper source. Then in the second invitation, when it was stated that he must come, then they said he could go. So the crux of the matter is that the Dalai Lama was going to India. The Dalai Lama was the owner of all Buddhism and on behalf of all the various Buddhist organizations, he was sent an invitation for the 2,500 anniversary. Later the Chinese said that he could go.

However, they said that he could only say this and could not say more than that, and prepared his speeches and gave them to him. At that time, the 17-Point Agreement was in [our] hands. So where does one draw the line when it is said that the Dalai Lama's power and status is to remain as before when they do not even give him the authority to speak? Where does one draw the line? Is it in line with the 17-Point Agreement or not? Did the Chinese overstep it or did the Tibetans overstep it? What happened was that through sheer force, after they had already stepped up and entered Tibetan land, then they were saying such things. At first, they were saying that, via Tibet, they wanted to go further into Asia. That they wanted to borrow and make roads. "We want to make roads for transportation. We won't even take a needle or a thread." That's what they were saying. After the 17-Point Agreement and having all come up, and while saying that the Dalai Lama's power was to remain, they dictated what the Dalai Lama had to say. However, as I mentioned yesterday, we altered the speeches and the Dalai Lama did not read the Chinese prepared ones, but they were interfering, and even interfering regarding his going and staying [Tib. phebs bzugs]. So forget about the status of the Dalai Lama, they did not even abide by the standards of human rights. And the Dalai Lama was regarded like a toy that they could do anything with, saying, for example, that the Dalai Lama had to go to the National People's Congress.

Around this time, what I heard was: in March the revolt began, right? In April, it was said that the Dalai Lama was to go to the National People's Congress. That was the news in Lhasa. Therefore, all the way from Tö and all over, representatives arrived saying to the Dalai Lama, "Please don't ever go to China." So many representatives came to make petitions. Tibetans from everywhere were saying not to go. If that couldn't work, then that was it, right? It would be a disaster for the Dalai Lama. However, since it was a big issue, Zhang Guohua, the military commander, and Zhang Dai Biao, the main civil representative, went back to China, and at the time of the uprising, those two were not there in Lhasa. The reason they went to China was that in the National Congress meeting, assume that the order from Beijing was for the Dalai Lama to go down. If they did not take the Dalai Lama down, then those two would have been in Tibet and their job would not have been accomplished, right? When they were talking about "taking" the Dalai Lama to China, then there were all of these petitions which showed that it was against the wishes of the Tibetan people. Now, if they were able to take the Dalai Lama down to China without much opposition, then it was okay, right? If not and if the people were doing all sorts of things, then they were wondering how to solve it, and so it had reached an important decision point. That was the reason they were going down to Beijing. We did not know this at that time, and neither did I know about it today. However, since it had reached a point where a big decision had to be made, if they were going to use force, then how to do it? In a big way, saying that the people were rising up and if they could get the order when they were present there, they would do something. So they went to finalize that decision. That was what we among the officials were thinking, saying, "Oh! Today's action was done for this and that reason." We were saying these things. That was what we were speculating because their internal matters we did not know, right?

After the two went down, as to who was the second representative in charge? It was Tan Guansan, the one who was in charge of firing the guns on the 20th. Tan Guansan, after having completely finalized the military preparations, was just ready to pull the trigger. Then the two Chinese officials went down to discuss the finalization. After they returned to Beijing, it was decided that the Dalai Lama was to go down to the NPC meeting in April. What Tan Guansan did was this. It is said, you know, in each region there was a person in charge. If Tibet, which was under the command of Tan Guansan, was taken, and if he put the Chinese flag on Tibet, the reward was to go to Tan Guansan, or whoever did it. So full preparations were made, and while those two were away, and even whether they were there or not, the preparations were all completed and the thinking was that all that was left to do was to just give the command. Tan Guansan had hoped to be the one to receive the reward. So the Dalai Lama being taken and invited to the Tibet Autonomous Region, it is said that Tan Guansan was thinking along these lines.

How was it said that he made the preparations? The Dalai Lama was to be taken to the Tibet Autonomous Region. From China, a performance troupe came specifically for the occasion of the great Mönlam Festival, which the Dalai Lama attended. After the ceremonies, the Silingpu wanted to specially do something for that occasion, and the performance was to be done in the main Chinese military headquarters. [answer not finished]

**Q:** Silingpu?

**A:** Yes, yes, Silingpu. The military headquarters. While the Dalai Lama came down to Lhasa [from the Potala] for the Mönlam, and while he was staying there, during a break in the ceremony they sent a request for the Dalai Lama to come to the military headquarters for a performance of the show, since he was at Lhasa. They sent two common Chinese cadres and made the request through the gag (Secretariat). The Dalai Lama said, "Well, at this moment I have to be here for the main ceremony on the 15th (of the 1st lunar month). During this period I have so much to do and I can't manage to visit. I will see if it can be arranged after the 15th." So they returned. Then after the 15th, they made the request again. At that time, it was time for the procession [for the Dalai Lama to leave for Norbulinga] and it was said that it may be better to discuss it after the Dalai Lama reached Norbulinga, since the ceremonies were continuous and there was no break [Tib. mdzad seng]. That was the second reply.

On the 25th of the 1st month of the Tibetan calendar, the Dalai Lama's procession from the Tsuglagang to Norbulinga was completed. I think it was on the 27th or 28th that they approached him at Norbulinga and asked when the Dalai Lama would be coming. The Dalai Lama replied, "I guess we can go the day after tomorrow." So he was to go in two days.

The next day at the Trungja meeting, all the tsidrung were gathered, right? And since the Chinese had reported (settled) the visit the day before, Phala told the Tsendrön, "Tomorrow you have to go to the Silingpu and from among you, two have to go. There is not going to be a large entourage as usual, so two of you get ready." This was after the Trungja, so they had to stay at the [Tse] ga for a while. It was during that time that Chemmo told them this. Two were chosen. They were to go the next day (as the Dalai Lama's entourage).

The military headquarters [Ch. jun qu], even in the Dalai Lama's autobiography it is said that the junqu was the main military headquarters. That's all that was mentioned. If one were to inquire how Silingpu was built, not a single Tibetan was involved in it and when they began construction, the whole area was completely surrounded by soldiers and nobody was ever allowed near the construction site. It was built only by soldiers. These days what we hear about the way the military headquarters was built is that later, after the uprising, all the government officials were imprisoned in the military headquarters. Many of those who were locked up in the military headquarters have now come to India. Tembala came out from the military headquarters. Temba Söpala and Söthab Chögyela, anyway, most officials came out of the military headquarters, the more important ones. The military headquarters was built in a quadrangle design. At each quarter was a gunnery unit [Tib. so khung] which had a sunken level, and the top part jetting out. At about the ground level there were small holes for guns. In the middle of the area there was a big divide.

This side was the military camp, areas where the soldiers stayed and the recreation area. The other half at the back was all prison cells for a little over 300 prisoners. In the inner area there were a number of single person cells. In Tibet, beams are arranged and then on the beams are smaller branches covered with soil. What the Chinese did was to put beams and then steel sheets on the roof of the military headquarters' prison. The doors, except for a little space, reached right to the ceiling. Below the door was a small opening and there was no light coming in. That was the cell for each individual. Then they had cells for 4 or 5 people, then for 8-9 people, and then two or three large cells for about 40 or so people. On one side was the wall and there was a space after that without a roof. In that area, truckloads of handcuffs and shackles just filled the area. Near the door were four Chinese

blacksmiths sitting four abreast facing each other. Kundeling Bamey Kūsang la [Tib. bar smad kun bzang lags], a famous leader of the Tibetan Women's Association, was imprisoned there and since no one was at home, her little girl was in prison too. This girl who went in there saw all of that, the chains, the hammering and the cries coming out, full of noise. She looked in there and saw the prisoners get chained with stiff shackles [Tib. mdung lcags], and then after that, they were led into the prison cells. The prison was huge, whether it was a military or Lhasan prison. If this was the prison, whether it was Tibetan or Chinese or whoever, since it was a prison, sometimes they needed prisoners, right? When they built the prison it was all empty.

The Dalai Lama was to be invited to their military headquarters, which was in the front where they were going to have the show. While the two Chinese leaders were down in China, a way was planned to get the Dalai Lama without firing a single shot. So without saying anything about all the prison cells in the military headquarters, they invited the Dalai Lama to the military camp. If the Dalai Lama had gone there, then how would it have been? The place to be taken was at the back in the empty cells. The ranking government officials were all to be arrested and that's where they were going to be locked up, right? So no one knew that there was a prepared prison because no one had been there. The moment they heard that the Dalai Lama was to be taken to the military headquarters, the Tsendrön, who would be the first to hear about it, had a discussion. At that time, my uncle was the Tsendrön shugja in the gag [Tib. 'gag bzhugs bya] and he had to stay there on duty. He said he was staying there when the Tsendrön received the order from Phala and then left. Uncle, after the gag was over, was sitting in the sun making entries in the record book of the Tse ga when Bashi Tsendrön came by. He told him, "Jedrungla, Jedrungla (a monastic title Bashi held), come over here. The Dalai Lama is going tomorrow and you were not present (at the Drungja). I thought it would be good if you went (as a part of his entourage), but now someone else is going (with him)."

Then Barshi Jedrungla said, "Now it's finished, finished. Is the Dalai Lama being taken to the military headquarters? It's finished now." "The fact that the Dalai Lama is going to the military camp makes me so apprehensive." This, like a story, is told by Barshi in his writings and so I won't repeat it. The military headquarters' camp was constructed that way and had these facilities. So if the Dalai Lama was permitted to go that day, usually when the Dalai Lama went to the Tibet Autonomous Region, it seemed that many officials and 25 soldiers would go as his entourage. What they said that day was that the Kalön and one or two personal attendants could go, but the Kalön could take only one servant and they should not bring arms, since all would be searched. Since this was a military camp, one could not bring arms. And they said, "There is no need to bring 25 soldiers. One or two will do. The arms will be handed over at the gate. The public also cannot come past the bridge. From Shöl [towards the military camp] there is a bridge, so please tell the people that they cannot come past that." The 25 or so people handed over their arms at the gate and once taken inside, at the rear was the prison. This was the place that they were going to invite the Dalai Lama to. The fact that it was a prison and had cells ready is something said today, but we did not know it at the time. However, the fact that [the Dalai Lama] was invited to a military camp made everybody very apprehensive. That was putting him in Chinese hands, right? That's the reason the people rose up.

**Q:** When did they begin constructing the military headquarters?

**A:** It must have been around 1951 or 1952, because the place where they built the camp was empty land, and that's where they first stayed in tents. Then when they made measurements, it was a big area, and since it was right in front of the Potala Palace, they built it.

**Q:** Did the Chinese invite the Dalai Lama to see shows in other places?

**A:** No.

**Q:** Even if not for the Dalai Lama, but for others, officials?

**A:** That they did quite often. They showed movies at the Tibet Autonomous Region and performances also occurred at Yuthok Hall.

**Q:** Therefore, if they wanted to invite the Dalai Lama, then they could have invited him to other places, right?

**A:** Yes, they could. But beyond that, they said that there was going to be no change to the customs of the people, and then to tell the Dalai Lama to come out in public, in the meeting halls to see a show is not at all within the terms of the 17-Point Agreement. If they wanted to offer a show, then they should have done it in the Potala at Deyangshar [Tib. sde yangs shar] where the Cham dance on the 29th [Tib. dgu gtor 'cham] usually takes place. There is a special room to view the performance. At Norbulinga there is a special place for that too. They could have offered the show anywhere. There was no need to show it in the military headquarters. So the idea seems to be that while the two top leaders were away, they hoped that if they had the Dalai Lama in their hands, then they could send him to China if need be, or do whatever they liked with him. If the Dalai Lama was taken into the military headquarters, then who was going to fight or go to war knowing that he was in there? They wouldn't allow it. At this time in Amdo, people like Shar Kenden Gyatso [Tib. shar skal ldan rgya mtsho], and other important lamas and elites were invited to dinners and shows and were then arrested. That's the way they seized people, always fooling people.

**Q:** Did we talk about this? That when the Chinese came to have an audience with the Dalai Lama. Some say that in the beginning it was alright, but later things got worse. Did we talk about that?

**A:** No, not now. Regarding this, I haven't talked to any others except saying that our uncle was on duty to stay at the gag (Secretariat). Actually, it had not really been time for his turn [Tib. ming tshams] to do that job, but at this time, there was a severe danger from the Chinese side, so they needed someone who was totally reliable and who didn't have connections with the Chinese. So from among the Tsendrön, he was asked to stay. While he was there, during audiences he was serving tea and things. That was the work of the one on duty.

**Q:** I see.

**A:** Since my uncle did that work, he said that we couldn't be confident about even the life of the Dalai Lama at audiences. It was just left to the gods since the Dalai Lama was alone, and he obviously didn't carry any arms. Never. He was staying like that, and anywhere from 5-6 Chinese would go in to meet him, and if the door was slammed shut, one could not even hear them talk. If they suddenly drew a gun or a knife and shots rang out, even if some guards were to come later, what was finished was finished. He said if he had to think about the Dalai Lama's personal safety, then there was no way of being confident about the audiences with the Chinese.

**Q:** If some Chinese were to come, then did they come with guns?

**A:** There was no custom of searching the Chinese. They couldn't bring a rifle, but if they had a pistol on them, then they would go in.

**Q:** There was no custom of searching them and then letting them go in?

**A:** No, there was never any. Once they had made full preparations for their position in Tibet, then their power continued to increase. The ones who then came to see the Dalai Lama were just common cadres from Beijing. There was no ranking ones among them. Then they would say they would come tomorrow, or they would come later. And they would drive the car right up to the window level, and when they got there, they smoked and all the best snacks were given. Then they enjoyed it so much that they just hung around and relaxed. The Chinese women smoked too. Then they stayed at the Dalai Lama's room for a long time. If they needed an audience, then they should have said what one had to say, receive the order and then leave, rather than hanging around smoking cigarettes, and so how much regard was there for the Dalai Lama? So they saw it like they could just rub him, as if to say, "Whatever happens now, he is in our hands."

**Q:** From our side, if the Kashag or other officials had to seek an audience with the Dalai Lama, what was the custom? Suppose one came riding, where did one get off?

**A:** By horse, everyone got off at the main gate. Shapes could ride and get off at the gates of Shabden Lhagang, otherwise, everyone got off at the Norbulinga main gate where there is the stone lion (statue), whether it was a Dzasa, Ta Lama, Magji, whoever it was, including Lamas. The Dalai Lama's tutors and the Shape rode up to the Shabden Lhagang. Then whatever audience had to be done, it was not done taking a long time. That type of audience did not exist. Whatever one had to say one said it. Then one received the reply and then one left right away. For the Dalai Lama, one had to request the audience two days before [Tib. bzhes brda snyan seng]. For the secretariat of the regent and Sitsab, the shö ga, one requested one day before and it was called [Tib. gnangs brda]. This custom was all gone (as far as the Chinese).

Therefore, as for the contents of the 17-Point Agreement, beginning with small things, but in the end with such things as the Tibetan customs, it was something to be just stomped upon by the Chinese. They never thought, "Oh! It is their custom." At first they considered such things, then they did not at all. In the same way, their orders to the offices and to the People's Association said, "You cannot do this. Ones who are in it must be arrested, imprisoned and it should be made sure that such things cannot happen."

That was what the Chinese were saying, and regarding Dekara's (Lukhangwa's) reply and all, I have already mentioned that to you. Take for example, Kungö Lhasey Chemmo (Gyalo Thondup), and I think Lukhangwa was there, and Jenkhentsisum. The Chinese ordered the Kashag to send an order telling them to return from India since they were working (against China) from there and it was not good. If they did not return and did not listen to the order, then the Kashag must give an order expelling them from the ranks of Tibetans [Tib. bod mi rigs nas phud pa]. That's how much they demanded. So they were forced to give that order also and at the Trungja, Chemmo read the order which stated that the ones in India did not pay heed to the order to return, and as a consequence, they were no longer part of the Tibetan fold. So at Trungja, Chemmo had to say that. Now, how much power had the Chinese gotten? The Tibetan government was a play thing; what was happening to it? It was a situation where whatever they told you to do, you had to do it and if you did not do it, then there was great danger.

It was the same as how the seals were affixed down there (in Beijing on the 17-Point Agreement). Once they were ready to use force, then it became a situation where it was not possible to do otherwise. These are, what should I say, examples of a show of power and saying things not based on the truth. During the two Sitsabs' time, they said a lot of things and when the Sitsab gave them rightful answers, things lasted until 1959 (laughter). If the Chinese had the right to say those things, whatever was said, when it was answered, then that was it. (In other words, the two Sitsab gave such a proper answer that the Chinese could not do anything.) Even right now they are saying, "Don't talk about independence." It's just the way they talk, (loathsome) and one can see very clearly from that statement that they have absolutely no rights and reasons.

If you don't talk about independence, then we can discuss things. If you talk about independence, then there can never be discussions. So they are saying this now and such talk is not based on the law. (They would say,) "If they are talking about independence, then let them talk and convey what they have to say. So the reason why you are saying you are independent is such and such. Now, from history it is such and such. So now tell me, are you not part of China? Now there is no use talking about independence. When one speaks it has to be answered." And so from this one can see that there is no basis or right to give proper answers. [What they did] was to steal the government, and from sheer power [Tib. btsan dbang dbang shugs] they said, "You cannot talk about independence, ever." So just from such talk it is not something based on law. To our ears they are just saying things by bullying. The fact that there is no avenue for answering what is right and what is not, saying that you cannot say such things, whose custom is that?

That's why I remember something that Dekara said. When all the kungö were gathered here I asked them, but they were not able to tell me clearly. Dekara said, "Don't talk too much, but from the perspective of truth, from documents, if you can prove it then say it. From documents we can, from any perspective, make a refutation if you ask us to lay all the documents on the carpet and then talk. If you say, 'We will not accept documents, and so are you going to do it or not?' then we have no reply to give to you. Then it's

as you think." This did take place since it was told to me by Shasur Phüntselā [Tib. bshad zur phun tshe lags].